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ABSTRACT

While the Federal Government of Canada has the legal responsibility for Indian education, only Indian people can develop a philosophy of education based on Indian values. A conflict of cultural values, which is imposed through education, causes many drop-outs and failures among young Indians. Indian children must be able to preserve their own values and live comfortably with their own people. A child's whole school experience should reinforce and contribute to the image he has of himself as an Indian. He must learn about his own community and be encouraged to identify positively with it. The National Indian Brotherhood's education policy emphasizes that parent participation and native teachers and counsellors are essential to the realization of these goals. An education authority on the reserve should be empowered to act for the band in all educational matters. The Federal Government must provide opportunities for Indian people to train as teachers and counsellors. National, provincial, and territorial Indian organizations must promote training programs and encourage young Indians to enter the professions. Indians of Quebec Association have a five year plan to train native teachers and linguists to implement curriculum changes when the bands are prepared for administrative take-over (transfer of administrative and financial control to Indians), and an Education Service has been organized to assist with problems. (CM)

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INDIAN CONTROL

OF

INDIAN EDUCATION

BY

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INDIAN CONTROL OF INDIAN EDUCATION

Learning is a life-long process-equipping people for living

Throughout my 51 years, learning has been a daily exercise for me. To this very day I look ahead to new experiences, to new contacts which will broaden my knowledge and understanding of this world and the people in it. It is my firm conviction that education is a life-long process. It cannot end after 8 or 12 years, nor can all wisdom and knowledge be wrapped up in the diploma that the student carries away from the school.

Good teachers in the modern education system are committed to what happens in the school, and rightly so. It is their task to reduce the body of human knowledge to some manageable dimension which will be within the comprehension of the young of our species. The purpose, of course, is to equip them for living. It is generally accepted that the more years of schooling, the better will be the living which is what education has come to mean in this society. Learning how to <u>earn</u> is the governing - if unspoken - principle in modern education.

Those who accept this philosophy of education encourage individual competition for the limited amount of riches available in this world. School subjects and experiences are geared to insuring success to those who persevere until the end of the course. Those who drop-out before the end are the inevitable casualties of an elitist system which has room for only a select, successful, few at the top.

Indian Philosophy

If we are to understand what Indian education is all about, we must understand how it differs from prevailing educational practices in this society. It would be misleading to pretend the material benefit or tangible success are not important to us. Each man in his own way is looking for security and reward of some kind.

But the Indian way is to seek them on a collective basis, with no one person profiting at the expense of the others, and no one enjoying a solitary pleasure. In this context, a university graduate can be considered a greater failure than a grade school drop-out, if he does not relate his education to his community and to his fellowman.

One of the biggest mental and emotional adjustments we have to make is on the question of drop-outs and failures. We have been conditioned to believe that completion of a fixed course of studies within a fixed time span is the only formula for success in education. Indeed it may be the only way to success in the system, but it is not the only way to succeed in life.

All of us would encourage young people to go as far as possible in the institutional system, to learn the skills and acquire the knowledge needed to benefit himself and others, but never at the sacrifice of his Indian values and integrity. The Indian education policy comes to grips with this dilemma.

Simply Common Sense

The idea of making education relevant to Indians, by putting it under the control of Indians is simply common sense. The conflict of values which has been the inevitable result of imposing an alien culture through education, can be blamed for many drop-outs and failures among young Indians. In my vocabulary, a drop-out does not necessarily mean a failure. This may be the only way a child has to protect himself and his integrity. This is certainly a sub-conscious reaction for the child, when he feels himself threatened, but his teachers, his parents and the community should recognize it for what it is.

If Indian children are to succeed in school they must be able to preserve their own values, to live comfortably with their own people. I can see this happening if they can learn about their own community and are encouraged to identify positively with it. Needless to say, this will have a wholesome effect on the community, and should lead to renewed pride and purpose among Indian people.

These ideas have emerged from the realm of wishful thinking and are now being tried out by several bands across Canada. Today we have examples of the involvement of Indian parents in the education of their children which has resulted in community consciousness and action bordering on a revolution in education.

It is too soon to tell what impact these changes will have on education for Indians, but some of the principles which are behind the thinking

and expression found in the Indian education policy paper, INDIAN CONTROL OF INDIAN EDUCATION, are worthy of examination. The whole concept of "Indian Control" is causing uneasiness and doubts for some people, both Indian and white. I want to relate this concept to the idea of local control in the context of the Indian community, and to relate local control to the work of teachers, and to the goals and objectives of Indian organizations across the country.

Contrary to what is feared by some Indian parents and white educators, we are not promoting racial separatism, nor urging a return to reserve schools and segregated classrooms. That kind of education is not...and never was...Indian education.

Principles of Control

The Indian philosophy of education is in many ways a more valid and universal one than the one which prevails in educational circles today. Instead of a one-sided view of history, we want our children to learn a Canadian history which attaches honour to the customs, values, accomplishments and contributions of this country's original inhabitants and first citizens, the Indian Canadians of Canada.

We want our children to learn how to add, subtract, multiply and divide, but we don't want them to become greedy and grasping in the process.

We want our children to learn science and technology so that they can promote the harmony of man with nature...not destroy it.

We want our children to learn about their fellow men in literature and social studies, and in the process to learn to respect the values and culture of others.

An Indian philosophy of education looks at learning and teaching as an integral part of living, both for the teacher and the child. It is not a five hour, five day-a-week exercise for a dozen or so years. It is a life-long commitment.

Non-Indians also critical

We are not alone in working for change and improvement in the present system. Many non-Indian parents deplore the education which their children are getting. There is great disillusion across the country with the curriculum and with the methods being used in the school system today. Many non-Indian parents are angered with the superficiality and irrelevance of the education which their children are getting. Their criticism of the system echoes the very ideas I have just expressed and which are found in our policy paper. Viewed in the light of goals and values, Indian education makes sense to every parent who wants his child to learn at school all he needs to know in order to live a good life. I would like to quote a short passage which is found in the policy paper:

> "As our fathers had a clear idea of what made a good man and a good life in their society, so we Indians of today, want our children to learn that happiness and satisfaction come from:

- pride in one's self, which encourages us to recognize and use our talents; as well as to master the skills needed to make a living.
- understanding one's fellowmen to enable us to meet with other Canadians on equal footing, respecting cultural differences while pooling resources for the common good.
- living in harmony with nature to insure preservation of the balance between man and his environment which is necessary for the future of our planet, as well as for fostering the climate in which Indian Wisdom has always flourished. We want education to give our children the knowledge to understand and be proud of themselves and the knowledge to understand the world around them."

During the drafting of the policy, those involved tested each sentence, each idea by the standard of flexibility. Many times the question was asked: "Does this box anybody in?". The policy puts into writing the general objectives we want to achieve in education. Each community will have its own specific goals and ideas on how to reach them. Respect for each other's opinions and methods is a cornerstone of Indian culture. This is safeguarded and encouraged by the policy.

Just like the educational process itself, our policy on education is on-going and evolutionary. We did not put a final "period" on the last page. The policy will be revised and refined as time goes on and as the Indian contribution to education becomes visible and meaningful.

We have no cause to be complacent just because we have published a policy paper. Words and wishes will not change the system. We, the Indian people, will have to change it by our participation and action. It is a difficult task we have set for ourselves and one that requires courage and determination. We cannot afford to fall into the trap of talking big, making noise, and then going back into the same old rut, satisfied to let the Government run our lives for us. We have to put action where our mouth is and renounce forever the psychology of dependence which has benumbed us for a hundred years. If we can identify each other, establish common goals, join hands, then there is no discouragement, no opposition, no self-doubts, that can defeat us. Our strength will be in unity and mutual support.

Four Point Policy

This is the goal of the National Indian Brotherhood. Our member organization, the provincial/territorial associations of Indians across Canada, have given us the mandate to draft policy statements on several issues which are of great concern at this time. The education policy was the first one completed, for the reason, that most provincial organizations had already made their positions public between the years 1971 and 1973. This national policy is a collection of all the statements of Indian organizations covering all areas of concern in Indian education. It has its origin in the concern of parents for the academic failures of their children in federal and provincial schools over the past several years.

Our policy deals with four broad issues: parental responsibility, school programs, teachers, and school facilities. When it was presented to the Minister in December, 1972, it was meant to be an answer to that question which Department officials ask, sometimes in desperation, sometimes in ridicule: "Well what do Indian people want?".

We hope it answers that question not only for Government, but for Indian people who can use it as a tool to facilitate their thinking and action on the two essential principles of education: local control and parental responsibility.

Local control of education is a fundamental concept in the philosophy of democratic governments. In fact it is a feature which should distinguish free political systems from those of a totalitarian nature in which every facet of living comes under the scrutiny and control of the ruling party. I need not elaborate on the irony of past total control exerted on Indian people by a democratic government. I will only say, that by our efforts we are forcing change in the way that Government deals with us.

Ironic Situation

There is another irony, however, in the fact that the Federal Government is now recognizing the right of Indian people to control education at the local level, while at this very time, provincial governments are gradually taking over control of public education and removing it from the jurisdiction of local school boards.

We have had working sessions with representatives of the Canadian School Trustees Association, for the purpose of explaining our policy and soliciting their support. At first, our ideas met with some resistance, but after frank and free discussions, these people, parents themselves, realized that their own rights are being threatened by government, and that they themselves will have to soon take action similar to ours if they want to maintain their rights as parents to decide the quality and kind of education which their children receive. These representatives assured us that non-Indian parents can identify very easily with our determination to regain control of education.

Little by little the provinces are taking over everything, leaving only token power in the hands of local school boards and parents. This process has already been completed in New Brunswick and is well on its way in other places. Parent-interest groups, such as the School Trustees, are fighting this, but will have to be satisfied with limited power at best, for the reason that more and more of the money is coming from provincial coffers. It boils down to a simple problem of mathematics: the amount of control is directly related to the amount of money invested.

The reason I bring this out is that we cannot look to anyone else for answers. We must work this out for ourselves. When we look at our own situation we see an entirely different problem.

Disastrous Practice

Under the terms of the treaties, the Federal Government has the obligation to provide funds for the education of Indian people. This is an

incontestable fact. In no way does the principle of "Indian control" or "local control" contradict or nullify this fundamental federal obligation. Control of these funds, or more precisely, the power to make decisions on how they will be spent, has been exercised almost exclusively by the Department of Indian Affairs by public-service staff far removed from Indian life or Indian thinking. We have evidence of the disastrous results of this practice.

While we assert that the Federal Government has the legal responsibility for Indian education as set down by the treaties and the Indian Act. we strongly maintain that only Indian people can develop a suitable philosophy of education based on Indian values adapted to modern living. We do not accept that the Government's financial responsibility justifies its dominance over our lives. Our policy demands the right of Indian parents to participation and partnership with the Federal Government in the education of our children.

In theory, local control of education funds by Indian parents is now possible under a Treasury Board directive which authorizes the transfer of education money from the Department of Indian Affairs to Band Councils under the Contributions to Bands program. In practice, however, it is not yet clear just how much control Indians will have over that money. We accept that there are restrictions attached to the use of public funds, and that some form of accountability is necessary. What has to be more clearly defined is the role of the Department in giving the final approval or disapproval of Band Council budgets and proposals for spending,

Root of Policy

Our policy is rooted in the authority of the Band, and by extension, its elected representatives, the Band Council. It will soon be necessary for the Government and the Treasury Board to recognize that authority, and to deal with Band Councils directly, accepting their accountability as valid, without the mediation of the Department of Indian Affairs. Not all Bands desire at this time to accept this kind of responsibility, but each one should have the opportunity to decide its own time and to take the necessary steps to improve its situation.

A Band Council often deals with education on the reserve by the appointment of Band Council members to an education committee of the Council. During a certain period in the past, the Department developed a school committee policy by which it directly named band members to an advisory school committee which was responsible to the Department and often at odds with the Band Council or its education committee. The National Indian Brotherhood education policy calls for an education authority on the reserve which is empowered to act for the Band in all matters dealing with education. This body, however it is appointed or elected, is subordinate to the Band Council and responsible to it. It might be called a school committee, an education committee, or an education authority. Whatever the name, it should be given a free hand by the Band and its Council to develop education programs which will benefit the community.

A Dangerous Idea

It is easy to say that certain decisions are too sophisticated for Band Councils to make, and should remain within the Department. But this

is a dangerous proposal to toy with. It undermines the authority of the Band Council by putting limitations on its legitimate application. The answer lies in more awareness of long term benefits and goals among the people charged with making education decisions for the Band. This will come with training and experience.

In the meantime, we will have to find solutions which will make it possible for Indian people to pursue these long term goals of research, services and professional development without necessary hardship or crisis. If we can maintain unity of purpose and action, if we can set our sights on common goals, there is no obstacle or problem which cannot be overcome.

I always like to remind people that it is only recently that the jobs of Chief and Councillor have had any prestige attached to them. In the past, individuals who had talents for business or leadership, used them elsewhere than in band politics, while those who accepted band jobs usually ended up being everybody's whipping boy.

Today things have improved, and there is now a new challenge in band management which should attract the best qualified people to serve their band for a few years. Those of us who have had more opportunities or a better education than most Indian people on reserves have had, should not forget that in most cases we have had our chance because of their sacrifices.

We have been lifted up on their shoulders, and we owe them: patience, understanding, support and loyalty.

Teachers and Local Control

When we talk about local control we mean control of Indian education. We would be very foolish indeed to bother talking over the headaches and troubles that come with the administration of a school, if we did not intend to do something about changing the philosophy, the curriculum, the programs, the learning and teaching in line with what we believe in for our children. I say, without any fear of contradiction, that none of this will happen, there will be no Indian education distinguishable from public education, unless we have quality Indian teachers in our classrooms.

Indian teachers...and all those who complement the teachers' work: teacher-aides, home-school coordinators, counsellors and counsellor-aides... are the backbone of Indian education. I am convinced of this. I would like to quote again from INDIAN CONTROL OF INDIAN EDUCATION, a short paragraph that puts into focus the job the teacher has to do:

> "Unless a child learns about the forces which shape him: the history of his people, their values and customs, their language, he will never really know himself or his potential as a human being. Indian culture and values have a unique place in the history of mankind. The Indian child who learns about his heritage will be proud of it. The lessons he learns in school, his whole school experience, should reinforce and contribute to the image he has of himself as an Indian."

Can we expect non-Indian teachers to do this for us? We must face the fact that lessons of language, culture and identity should come to children from their own families and communities. Where this is lacking or needs strengthening, we look to the school for reinforcement.

More Than 3R's

If it was only a matter of reading, writing and arithmetic we would undoubtedly be well off today, because our children can learn these things as well as anyone else. But education is more than that, and white teachers do not have any more to teach our kids. We cannot expect them to, nor can we ask them to.

In the policy, great emphasis is placed on the role of the school, the teacher and the classroom in protecting and encouraging the vigour of Indian language and culture. We know that language is much more than words; it is a treasury of the learning and thinking of our people. We must look to our own for the teachers who will transmit these lessons to our children.

Native Teacher Training

The policy paper emphasizes that the Federal Government must take the initiative in providing opportunities for Indian people to train as teachers and counsellors. Efforts in this direction require experimentation and flexible structures, which will allow the native person with talent and ambition to take advantage of the opportunity, even though he does not have very impressive academic qualifications. The response of the Federal

Government to this mandate has been financial support of programs carried out by universities or provincial Departments of Education. Our policy also calls on provincial governments to accept their responsibility in providing native people with a chance to improve their academic standing as they are receiving professional training.

Because of the importance to the Indian community, these programs should be developed in collaboration with Indian people. As our own professional people emerge, we can look forward to the day when we will be able to conduct our own training programs. In the meantime, national, provincial and territorial Indian organizations are instructed in the policy paper to do everything possible to encourage native young people to enter the professiona and to promote training programs across the country. At this point in time, considering our limited resources, we are not in a position to make much of an impact, but we are very concerned and we support every effort to train native teachers.

Reform Teacher Training

I do not want to give the impression that the work being done by non-Indian teachers is not appreciated. I would like to go on record as saying that they should be given more training, over and above their regular normal courses, to prepare them for cross-cultural situations, and to give them skills in curriculum development and adaptation. Indian history and culture, as well as anthropology, are courses which should be mandatory for any teachers who have Indian children in their classrooms whether in federal or provincial schools.

I know that the Department of Education in several provinces offer summer courses like this. But we are a long way from a teacher-training program that will insure that every teacher going into Indian Education has a specialized training in intercultural education and has a special knowledge of the cultural and linguistic background of the children he will be teaching. Probably less than 10% of the primary grade teachers in the federal and provincial systems have any knowledge of the local Indian language. If any progress is going to be made in improving educational opportunity for native children, it is basic that we urge the reform of the provincial teacher training programs.

Change in the learning environment for Indian children is one of the primary concern of Indian people across the country. The Indian political organizations are also aware of this, and while they have been accused of focusing their attention on the transfer of administrative and financial control to Indian people, without any concern for the quality of education, there is nothing farther from the truth. The Indians of Quebec Association, for example, have embarked on a five year plan by which they are training native teachers and native linguists who will be able to implement curriculum changes when the bands are prepared for the administrative take-over. No one is rushing into it, and I have repeatedly warned the Minister of Indian Affairs not to push the policy on anyone.

The Indian organizations are working together and have organized an Education Service to assist bands on problems they encounter in preparing and planning for take-over. We are proceeding slowly, without any preconceived ideas on how things should be done. As much as possible we

are tuned in to views expressed by community people through their provincial and territorial organizations. We are trying to keep all our channels of communication opened, so that the message of parental responsibility in education will reach Indian people in every part of Canada.

Conclusion:

I want to leave you with two thoughts which will pretty well summarize all the points I have made.

First: The Indian educational policy is only a tool in the hands of Indian parents. It points the way for significant improvements in educational opportunity, but remember, it is people who can make change; a policy only makes it possible.

Second: Indian teachers are the back-bone of Indian education. If we want to preserve our language and culture we must do it ourselves. We have the opportunity to do it; we have the talent to do it; and we must have the collective will to do it.

The final remark that I have to make is that Indian Control in the most practical terms, means Indian input, Indian influence on the education process. This may be on reserves or it may be in provincial or territorial schools. But it must result in improvement in the quality of education and in the creation of a learning environment which will give Indian

children the chance to know their own language, culture and history, and to develop their unique talents to the maximum potential.

INDIAN CONTROL OF INDIAN EDUCATION is a great challenge. To us parents it has given us the chance to renew the faith in ourselves and hope for our children. Indeed, we may very well represent the last link between the great traditions of our people and the modern life which surrounds us. The Wisdom and values of our ancestors have a place in our lives today and in the lives of our children tomorrow. We have each learned our own life experiences. This is what we will give to our children: the best of both cultures and a renewed pride in their Indian tradition. We dare not rest until this Wisdom is part of the education which our children receive in our schools.